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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that much of the time and money devoted to standardized testing in the United States is misspent. Too many tests are poorly constructed, unreliable, and unevenly administered. Multiple-choice tests cannot measure thinking skills or real problem-solving ability. In addition, many examinations are biased racially, culturally, linguistically, and by social class and gender. Use of these flawed tests leads to inaccurate and inappropriate decisions for individual children and harms the entire educational system because standardized tests provide little useful information for educational improvement. The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) urges changes in the use of tests to eliminate mass testing of young children for readiness, placement, and promotion. No decisions about a child should be made primarily on the basis of test scores and tests must be no more than one small part of an assessment. Valid and comprehensive unbiased alternatives must be developed. These themes are expanded on in the following sections: (1) "What's Wrong with Standardized Tests?"; (2) "Tests Used in K-12"; (3) "Better Options for Assessing Education"; (4) "Alternatives in the States"; (5) "Excerpts from the Statement of the Campaign for Genuine Accountability"; and (6) "FairTest Goals and Principles." (SLD)

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K-12 TESTING FACT SHEET

National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)

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FAIRTEST: NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAIR & OPEN TESTING

K-12 TESTING FACT SHEET

Fallout from the Testing Explosion

America's public schools administer more than 100 million standardized exams each year, including IQ, achievement, screening, and readiness tests.

Much of the time and money devoted to testing is misspent. Too many tests are poorly constructed, unreliable, and unevenly administered. Multiple-choice questions cannot measure thinking skills, creativity, the ability to solve real problems, or the social skills we want our children to have. Moreover, many exams are biased racially, culturally, linguistically, and by class and gender.

Unfortunately, use of these flawed tests leads to inaccurate and inappropriate decisions about children's education. Minorities and low-income children are too often excluded from "gifted and talented" programs and placed in special education or "mentally retarded" classes, where they do not get a good education. Results of tests given to young children are particularly erroneous.

Not only are individual children harmed, but so is the entire educational system. Test scores provide little useful information to help improve instruction and students' learning. In pursuit of higher test scores, the curriculum has been narrowed and "dumbed-down" to match the tests. Children learn less.

FairTest urges changes in the use of tests. First, mass testing of young children for readiness, placement and promotion must stop. Second, no decision about any child should ever be made primarily on the basis of test scores. Third, tests must be no more than one small part of assessing both students and educational programs. Fourth, valid, comprehensive, and unbiased alternatives must be developed (see inside). FairTest urges political and educational leaders to support the use of assessment methods that will help improve learning and instruction in our nation's schools.

INSIDE:

What's Wrong with Standardized Tests

Tests Used in K-12

Better Options for Assessing Education

Alternatives in the States

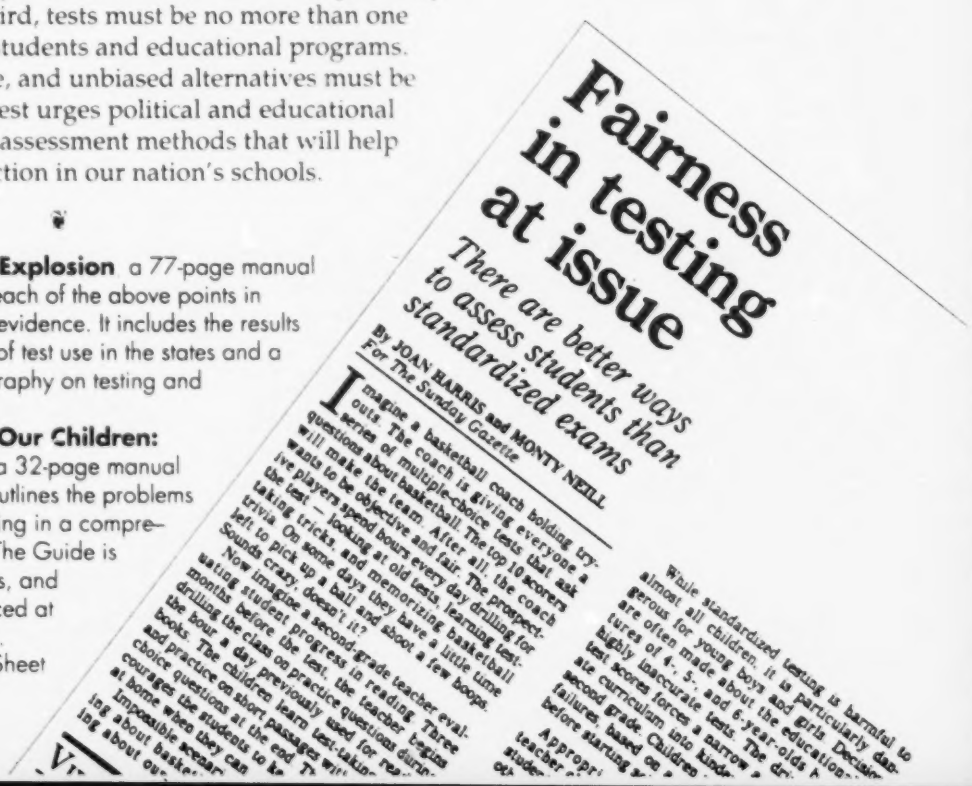
FairTest's Campaign for Genuine Accountability

FairTest Goals & Principles

Fallout from the Testing Explosion a 77-page manual researched by FairTest, explains each of the above points in detail with substantial supporting evidence. It includes the results of a FairTest survey on the extent of test use in the states and a comprehensive annotated bibliography on testing and testing reform.

Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, a 32-page manual available in English or Spanish, outlines the problems and solutions to standardized testing in a comprehensive, yet easy-to-read format. The Guide is appropriate for parents, educators, and community organizers, and is priced at only $4 (bulk discounts available).

Use the form inside this Fact Sheet to order your copies today.



Fairness in testing at issue

There are better ways to assess students than standardized exams

By JOAN HARRIS and MONTY NEILL
For The Sunday Gazette

Imagine a basketball coach holding tryouts. The coach is giving everyone a series of multiple-choice tests that ask questions about basketball. The top 10 scorers will make the team. After all, the coach wants to be objective and fair. The prospective players spend hours every day drilling for the test — looking at old tests, learning test-taking tricks, and memorizing basketball trivia. On some days they have a little time left to pick up a ball and shoot a few hoops.

Sounds crazy, doesn't it?

Now imagine a second-grade teacher evaluating student progress in reading. Three months before the test, the teacher begins drilling the class on practice questions during the hour a day previously used for reading books. The children learn test-taking tricks and practice on short passages with multiple-choice questions at the end. The teacher encourages the students to keep practicing at home when they can. It becomes impossible to read anything about basketball or anything else that is not in the form of a test question.

While standardized testing is harmful to almost all children, it is particularly dangerous for young boys and girls. Decisions are often made about the education of highly inaccurate tests. The 4-, 5-, and 6-year-olds test scores forces a narrow curriculum into kindergarten and first and second grade. Children who fail these tests are labeled failures, based on a single test, before starting school.

Appropriate teacher

What's Wrong with Standardized Tests?

ARE STANDARDIZED TESTS HELPFUL EVALUATION TOOLS?

No. Most standardized tests used in public schools have a multiple-choice or short-answer format in which each question has only one right answer. Instead of measuring the ability to think or create, they reward the ability to quickly answer superficial questions. They don't help teachers improve curriculum, instruction, and learning. They typically assume all test-takers have been exposed to backgrounds similar to those of test-developers: predominantly white and middle-class.

ARE STANDARDIZED TESTS OBJECTIVE AND FAIR?

The only objective part of most standardized tests is the scoring, which is done by machine. What items to include on the test, the wording and content of the items, the "correct" answers, how the test is administered, and the uses of the results are all decisions made by subjective human beings.

ARE TEST SCORES "RELIABLE"?

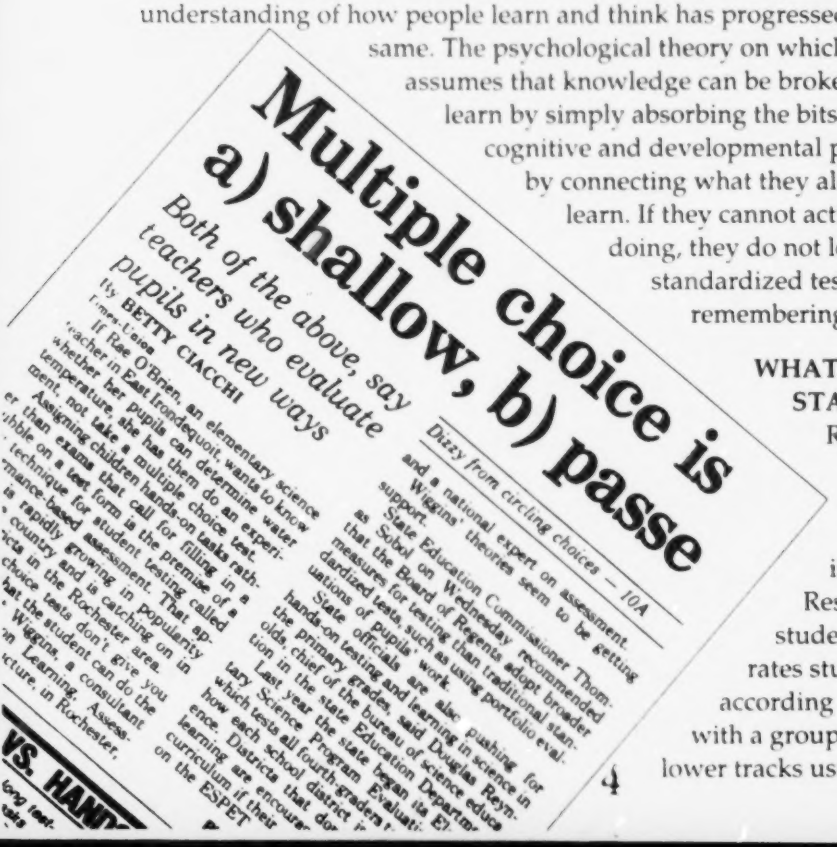
A test is completely reliable if you get exactly the same results each time you administer it. With all tests, an individual's score can vary greatly from day to day due to such factors as testing conditions, the test-taker's mental or emotional state, and whether a student has been coached. Test scores of young children are particularly unreliable.

DON'T TEST-MAKERS REMOVE BIAS FROM TESTS?

Most test-makers review items for obvious biases, such as racially offensive words. But this is inadequate, since many forms of bias are not easy to detect. Some test-makers also use "statistical bias-reduction techniques" to locate biased test questions. However, these techniques cannot identify underlying bias in the test's form or content. In fact, they assume the test as a whole is unbiased, which may not be the case.

DO TESTS REFLECT WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HOW STUDENTS LEARN?

No. Standardized tests are based on incorrect psychological theories from the early 1900s. While our understanding of how people learn and think has progressed enormously, tests have remained the same. The psychological theory on which tests are based — behaviorism — assumes that knowledge can be broken down into separate bits and that people learn by simply absorbing the bits of information provided to them. Today, cognitive and developmental psychologists understand that people learn by connecting what they already know with what they are trying to learn. If they cannot actively make meaning out of what they are doing, they do not learn or remember very well. But most standardized tests are still based on narrow skills and remembering isolated facts.


Multiple choice is a) shallow, b) passe

Both of the above, say teachers who evaluate pupils in new ways

Dizzy from circling choices — 10A

By BETTY CIACCHI

Times-Union

If Rae O'Brien, an elementary science teacher in East Irondequoit, wants to know whether her pupils can determine water temperature, she has them do an experiment, not take a multiple choice test.

Assigning children hands-on tasks rather than exams that call for filling in a bubble on a test form is the premise of a technique for performance-based student testing called assessment. That approach is rapidly growing in popularity country and is catching on in cts in the Rochester area.

hat the student can do the choice tests don't give you

n Learning, a consultant Wiggins, a consultant ucture, in Rochester.

and a national expert on assessment Wiggins' theories seem to be getting support.

State Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol on Wednesday recommended that the Board of Regents adopt broader measures for testing than traditional standardized tests, such as using portfolio evaluations of pupils' work.

State officials are also pushing for hands-on testing and learning in science in the primary grades, said Douglas Reynolds, chief of the state bureau of science education in the state Education Department.

Last year the state began its Elementary Science Program Evaluation, in which tests all fourth-graders' how each school district ence. Districts that do learning are encouraged curriculum if their on the ESPET

VS. HAND

long term

WHAT'S THE RESULT OF STANDARDIZED TESTING?

Relying on test scores contributes to harmful practices such as grade retention and tracking. Retention, commonly referred to as "being held back," keeps a student in the same grade for an additional year. Research has proven this usually hurts the student's educational progress. Tracking separates students in classes, programs, or schools according to their "abilities." A student usually stays with a group throughout the school years. Students in lower tracks usually receive an inferior education.

Tests Used in K-12

Despite their inaccuracies, limited capacity to measure academic achievement or ability, and other flaws, schools often use standardized tests to determine if children are ready for school, track them into instructional groups, diagnose for learning disabilities, retardation and other handicaps, and decide whether to promote, retain, or graduate many students. Schools also use tests to guide and control curriculum content and teaching methods. This is despite the fact that no test is good enough to serve as the sole or primary basis for these important educational decisions.

READINESS TESTS

These tests, used to determine if a child is ready to enter school, have been found to be highly inaccurate. On the basis of faulty tests, too many boys and girls are barred from entering school, inappropriately placed in special education, or improperly held back. These practices often lay the foundation for poor school performance and dropping out of school in later years.

Also, because too many schools "teach to the tests," their use encourages narrowly academic classrooms that are inappropriate to the emotional, social, and mental development of young children.

Black children, children from low-income families and children from homes where English is not the first language suffer most, because readiness tests often include cultural and language biases that result in lower test scores.

SCREENING TESTS

Used to detect disabilities and other problems, these tests are often not adequately validated. That means there is no clear proof they accurately measure what they claim to measure. While screening tests are supposed to be used to refer children for further diagnosis, they often are misused to place children in special programs. They also promote a view of children as having deficits to be corrected, rather than having individual differences and strengths on which to build.

ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

During the 1970s and 80s, the pressure for students to attain high test scores on standardized, multiple choice achievement tests increased tremendously.

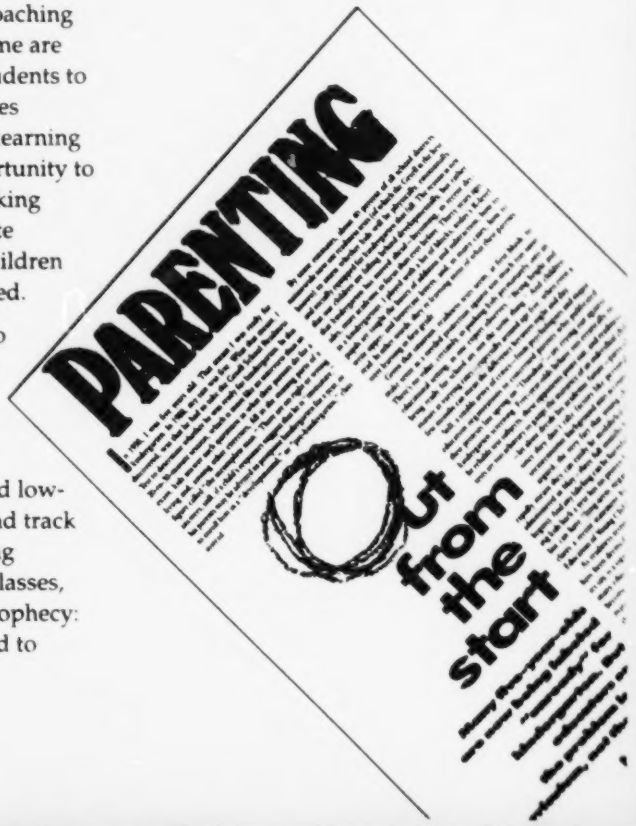
Achievement tests, however, seldom measure what they are said to measure. For example, multiple-choice reading tests actually measure a limited range of "reading skills," not the ability to understand and use printed materials.

These tests also only measure a narrow range of knowledge. Where raising scores has become the major goal of education, a school's curriculum is "dumbed-down." Classrooms become test coaching centers; months of class time are spent trying to prepare students to score high. This discourages children's enthusiasm for learning and undermines the opportunity to develop higher order thinking abilities and apply or create knowledge. As a result, children are not adequately prepared.

Achievement tests also tend to be biased in terms of culture, background, and language. Too often, schools use test scores of children from minority and low-income families to label and track them into "slow," "learning disabled," or "remedial" classes, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: those who are not expected to learn, don't.

IQ TESTS

These tests assume 1) "intelligence" can be measured; 2) "intelligence" is fixed; and 3) "intelligence" is a single entity. However, there is no agreement on any of these beliefs. In fact, studies have shown that IQ scores can be changed by training, nutrition, or simply by having more friendly people administer the test. In reality, IQ tests are achievement tests which primarily measure knowledge of standard English and exposure to certain middle-class experiences.



Excerpts from the Statement of the Campaign for Genuine Accountability in Education

The following are excerpts from the Statement of the Campaign for Genuine Accountability in Education, a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to improving the assessment and education of young children, founded by FairTest.

It is crucial that political and education officials, at all levels, recognize that standardized, multiple-choice tests are not an adequate means to measure educational progress, nor are high test scores an appropriate educational goal. There are educationally sound means of evaluation which can provide a basis for improving teaching, informing the public, and measuring progress, thereby providing genuine accountability.

The states, local districts, and the federal government should embrace the goal of moving away from reliance on standardized multiple-choice test scores and towards use of alternative, authentic, and appropriate methods of assessing educational performance and progress. In doing so:

- Education and political leaders should call for the use of appropriate and authentic evaluation in classrooms and to assess aggregate student achievement and progress; they should call for their states and local districts and federally funded programs, such as Chapter I, to implement available alternative assessment measures and continue to develop new ones for use in evaluating students and programs.
- These leaders should not call for raising standardized test scores as a goal of educational reform; should not call for new or additional testing with standardized, multiple-choice exams; should not rely on existing standardized tests as indicators of educational progress; and should not depend on standardized tests to make decisions about program placements...

Political and educational leaders at all levels should set a timetable for phasing out most uses of standardized, multiple-choice tests and replacing them with reliable, valid, and educationally appropriate alternatives. Before the implementation of alternatives, use of and reliance on standardized multiple-choice tests should be reduced as much and as quickly as possible.

List of Statement Signers

Advocates for Children of New York
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Federation of Teachers
American Reading Council
Angelo N. Ancheta, Asian Law Alliance*
APPLE Corps., Inc.
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Bank Street College of Education
Rims Barber, Mississippi Human Services Agenda
Leonard Beckum, Dean, College of Educ., City College of NY
Association for Women in Science
Diana Caballero, Puerto Rican/Latino Educ. Roundtable, NYC*
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for Women Policy Studies
Council for Basic Education
Robert W. Covert, Past President, American Evaluation Assn.*
Harold E. Dent, VP, Psychological and Human Resources Consultants*
Mary F. Dungan, Ysleta Independent School District, El Paso*
Educational Law Center, Inc.
Pablo Eisenberg, President, Center for Community Change*
Federation of Organizations for Professional Women
Foxfire Fund, Inc.
Fund for the Feminist Majority
Howard Gardner, Project Zero, Harvard University*
Genesee Valley Developmental Learning Group, New York
Leslie A. Hart, Brain-Compatible Education Associates
La Donna Harris, Americans for Indian Opportunity*
Asa Hilliard, Professor of Education, Georgia State University*
Holt Associates, *Growing Without Schooling*
Institute for Learning and Teaching
International Reading Association
Kentucky Association on Children Under Six
KEY - Kids, Education and You
A. Gay Kingman, National Congress of American Indians*
Massachusetts Advocacy Center
Matsushita Foundation, Inc.
Deborah Meier, Prin., Central Park East Secondary School, NYC
Samuel J. Meisels, Professor of Education, U. of Michigan
Sara E. Melendez, Vice-Provost, University of Bridgeport*
Mexican American Women's National Association
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)
National Coalition of Advocates for Students
Natl. Coalition of Title I/Chapter I Parents
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council for Social Studies
National Education Association
National Indian Youth Council, Inc.
National Organization for Women-New York City Chapter
National Parent Teacher Association
National School Boards Association
National Women's Law Center
National Women's Political Caucus
Fred M. Newmann, Natl. Ctr. on Effective Secondary Schools-University of Wisconsin*
New York Public Interest Research Group
NOW Legal Defense and Educ. Fund
Org. of Chinese American Women
Vito Perrone, Harvard U.-Graduate School of Education*
Project Equality, Inc., Kansas City, MO
Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc.
Rochester (NY) Teachers Association (AFT)
Lori Rubenstein, Partnership for Democracy*
William Saunders, National Alliance of Black School Educators*
William V. Schipper, Executive Director, National Association of State Directors of Special Education*
Hilton Smith, Coord., Foxfire Teacher Outreach Programs*
Southern Assn. on Children Under Six
Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Southern Regional Council, Inc.
Adria Steinberg, Harvard Education Letter*
United Federation of Teachers (New York City)
United States Student Association
Dorothy J. Watson, President, Whole Language Umbrella*
Paul Weckstein, Center for Law and Education*
Grant Wiggins, Ctr. on Learning, Assess. and School Structures
Arthur E. Wise, Rand Corporation*
Women's Research and Education Institute
Louisiana Assn. on Children Under Six
National Association of Early Childhood Educators

*Organization for identification purposes only

EDUCATION WEEK

Coalition Implores Bush, Governors To Avoid Use of Standardized Tests

By Robert Rothman

WASHINGTON—Charging that an emphasis on multiple-choice tests could "undermine many of the educational reforms which the governors and President Bush wish to achieve," a coalition of three dozen education and civil-rights groups last week urged those leaders to use alternative forms of assessment to measure progress toward national goals.

In a statement released here, the groups asserted that "standardized, multiple-choice tests are not an adequate means to measure educational progress, nor are high test scores an appropriate educational goal."

"Other, educationally sound means of evaluation exist," the statement continues, "and can provide a basis for improving teaching, informing the public, and measuring progress, thereby providing genuine accountability."

The groups urged the governors to "set a timetable" for phasing out their states' ex-

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Better Options for Assessing Education

Performance assessment — also called "authentic," "appropriate," or "alternative" assessment — directly measures educational achievement in the subject area. That is, it looks at actual student work. With young children, authentic assessment is often referred to as "developmentally appropriate."

Performance assessments employ a wide variety of techniques: written products, experiments, exhibitions, performances, portfolios of work, and teacher observations of regular classroom activity. They can be used to assess individual work and cooperative group projects.

The most widely used authentic assessment in education today is in writing. For example, many states ask students to write on assigned topics. The essays are graded by teams of trained readers who assign scores according to standard guidelines. The readers are trained and retrained throughout the process to maintain reliable standards.

Similar techniques are being used to create open-ended mathematics questions in which students must show how they worked out a problem's solution. Authentic social studies assessments include tasks which allow students to demonstrate they grasp important concepts about history or government. Foreign language assessments require students to use the language in real-life situations, orally and in print.

In order for these and similar assessments in reading, science, and other subjects to be most helpful, they should be integrated *with* the curriculum. Teachers can use assessment results to help determine students' needs and improve instruction. Students also learn to assume responsibility for their learning, and through the use of portfolios, engage in regular self-analysis of their work and progress. Performance assessments that provide documentation of a student's work over time can provide better information than standardized tests.

Authentic assessment information can be summarized numerically or put on a scale. Individual results can be combined to provide a variety of information about overall performance at the classroom, school, district, state, and national levels.

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Tests to Perform

States are shunning standardized tests

By Laurel Shaper Walters

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

BOSTON

THERE are 30 sheep and 10 goats on a ship. What's the age of the ... When this question is inserted ... middle of a standardized ... choice test, a majority of ... ildren ignore the correct ... tions ("none of the above"). In- ... add the two numbers ... 40. They have been ... when you see the ... in a word probl...

tack and the current shift in educational goals suggests that more sophisticated measurements are necessary.

The controversy was underscored earlier this month when Education Secretary Lauro F. Cavazos released the annual state-by-state performance report known as the "wall chart." The report card was released despite objections from the White House, officials acknowledged. Presiden...

At this time, however, educators are still learning how to use large-scale performance assessments reliably and fairly. Use of these assessment tools assumes major changes in curriculum and instruction in our schools. Since teachers become the primary assessors, they must receive the training necessary to use these new assessments. Outside participation by trained people can help ensure that racial or cultural bias does not distort the assessment process.

Alternatives in the States

Many states have begun exploring — and implementing — better forms of assessment as alternatives to multiple-choice tests. For example:

ARIZONA has begun to use performance-based tests at grades 3, 8 and 12 in reading, writing and math.

CALIFORNIA implemented the California Writing Program, started on alternative math assessments, and is experimenting in social studies and science.

CONNECTICUT is developing performance-based science and math assessments initiated by a multi-state consortium and the Coalition of Essential Schools under a grant from the National Science Foundation.

KENTUCKY plans to use primarily performance assessments in its new state assessment program.

NEW YORK has a 4th-grade science manipulation skills test and plans to change its Pupil Evaluation Program to emphasize portfolios, teacher evaluations and open-ended testing.

NORTH CAROLINA banned the use of standardized achievement tests in grades 1 and 2 and introduced assessments relying on teacher observation of classroom activity.

VERMONT is piloting the use of portfolios in grades 4 and 8 in math and writing.

MANY STATES use performance measures in some grades as part of statewide testing. Twenty-eight states include writing samples, for example.

FAIRTEST: NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAIR & OPEN TESTING
342 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139 • 617-864-4810

FairTest Works for Testing Reform

The **National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)** was founded at a 1985 conference which brought together 40 leaders of national education, civil rights, consumer, research and student organizations. Though all the groups were gravely concerned about the growing impact of standardized exams, none had the resources to make testing reform a top priority.

These key activists agreed their isolated testing reform campaigns could be enhanced by the increased visibility and coordination that would come from a new national organization. The result was **FairTest**.

Contribute to FairTest

How can you be part of the rapidly expanding movement to subject standardized tests to public scrutiny? Support the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, the only organization devoted exclusively to reforming testing in education and employment.

- For just $25, you can become a **FAIRTEST ASSOCIATE** and receive a subscription to the FairTest Examiner, the quarterly source of accurate and independent news about standardized testing advocacy and research.
- Become a **FAIRTEST SPONSOR** for $50 and you'll get a FairTest *Examiner* subscription and a complimentary FairTest publication.
- Contributors of $100 or more receive all the above plus a 20% publications discount, and become **FAIRTEST SUSTAINERS**.

I agree there's no better way to be part of the testing reform movement than by supporting FairTest! Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution.

- ❒ **FAIRTEST ASSOCIATE** ($25—includes a free subscription to the *Examiner*)
- ❒ **FAIRTEST SPONSOR** ($50 — includes *Examiner* and free publication)
- ❒ **FAIRTEST SUSTAINER** ($100 or more — includes above plus a 20% discount on all publications)
- ❒ **Other** _____

Publications:			
	Fallout from the Testing Explosion	$ 8.95 ea.	$ _____
	Standardized Tests and Our Children	$ 4.00 ea.	$ _____
	FairTest Examiner	$15.00 yr.	$ _____
		TOTAL	$ _____

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Please make checks payable to FairTest, 342 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139
(Contributions to FairTest are fully tax-deductible, except for the value of the publications.)

FairTest Goals & Principles:

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest), an advocacy organization, works to end the abuses, misuses, and flaws of standardized testing and to make certain that evaluation of students and workers is fair, open, accurate, accountable and educationally sound. The organization was founded in 1985 on these basic principles:

1. **TESTS SHOULD BE FAIR AND VALID.** Tests should provide equal opportunity, rather than favor individuals on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender or income level.

2. **TESTS SHOULD BE OPEN.** Independent researchers should have greater access to testing data, including evidence of test validity and reliability.

3. **TESTS SHOULD BE VIEWED IN THEIR PROPER PERSPECTIVE.** Safeguards must be established to ensure that curricula are not driven by standardized testing and that test scores are not the sole criterion by which major educational and employment decisions are made.

4. **ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS MUST BE DEVELOPED.** New methods of evaluation that fairly and accurately diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of students, workers and programs need to be designed and implemented.

To accomplish its goals, FairTest is involved in the following activities:

1. **PUBLIC EDUCATION.** FairTest serves as an important source of information about testing and alternatives for educators, parents, public officials, journalists and other policymakers.

2. **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.** FairTest provides information, training and strategic advice to parents, educators and a broad range of civil rights and women's organizations. FairTest also convenes conferences to discuss joint work and strategies.

3. **ADVOCACY.** FairTest coordinates and catalyzes educators, citizen groups and parents to bring about needed testing reforms.